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FROM





THE STAUNCH EXPRESS,

AND

WILD CATS.



THE  
STAUNCH EXPRESS,  
AND  
WILD CATS.

BY  
WILLIAM BATCHELDER GREENE.

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1892.

23448.60.19



Mrs. James D. Ames,  
Cambridge



# THE STAUNCH EXPRESS.

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## THE SPECIAL LOCOMOTIVE.

A locomotive's but an engine, though it traverse half  
the lands ;

A splendid creature still, in steel and brass array,  
With sleek and shiny back and polished sides,  
Suspended in its strength, in latent activeness compact;  
As ready for swift efforts evenly sustained between  
These vague horizons, right and left, that terminate  
the narrowing rails.

I am dispassionate ! Yet mark we well this steed of  
steeds,

That ever footless runs and wingless flies.

The funnel of its breath, its cycled huge supports—

The giant drive-wheel, like a big red setting sun ;

The ever - virile pistons, and the passive, patient  
cylinders,

The tilting shaft, reversing block, contraction gage  
and valves ;

The high condensing dome, its diaphragm and lungs :  
And all that is so wonderful without, yet fashioned  
by the hand of man.

Then hidden in its bulk, the convoluting bowel pipes,  
The fire-maw, for rude digestion and life-giving heat,  
The cinder-pan, for all that cannot be absorbed—  
that's cast into the draught.

Above, in shelter—valves, throttles, stop-cocks, facets,  
discs, and gages,

And what not of brass ; a dial for the oscillating  
pulse ;

The automatic clock, the "way bill" for the day,  
With list of fines, exclamatory whistle overhead ;  
The levers for the vacuum brake, the long-necked  
oil cans in rows ;

A gizzard grit-box for cold sleet or heavy grades :  
And there ahead—upon the creature's bulging breast—  
The mad-cap's big, round eyes, that only shine at  
night !

#### THE DRIVER SPEAKS.

"May never the day come when I shan't keep her  
axles under her.

The good old 'mile-a-minute' is not *good* enough.

They want to kill her—that they do! But isn't she  
a beauty, Sir?

Just one year old, and so hard put to it."

WATCHING THE EXPRESS.

Engulfing jetty coal, and streams from way-side  
tanks;

There, at some hurried stopping-place—some station  
—moored it lies;

Like some divided or linkèd snake, between the folds  
of hills,

That pants and hisses to be off anew;

Then footless runs and wingless flies .

Along the straight and curving, shining stretch.

It dives beneath the mountain, shoots along the lake,

That for an instant mirrors its long, glist'ning flank,

While the deep echoes of high cliffs cry out!

Away—by startled villages and clattering towns,

With close, resounding masonries, past disks and  
semaphores;

Through dark and hollow forests, that unbend and  
sway;

O'er sun-lit rivers, streams—at peace or turbulent—

O'er trembling, thund'ring bridges that protest and  
groan ;  
Till, like a black and rampant cockatrice, into the  
open plain  
It bursts again, with long white plume of steam and  
mane of smoke,  
That curls or catches on some solitary tree,  
Or falls far back on the spent whirlwind of its course,  
To strew the grass and patient flowers with red  
sparks,  
Or cloud-like rising, add its quota to the skies . . . .  
The staunch express is gone! And ambient nature,  
Now discarded back, closes behind the fiery way—  
Once more restored to peace.

## WITH THE EXPRESS.

A minute's worth its sixty seconds now!  
A furious pressure on—with tilting, rocking, galloping ;  
The jog and the bang, the rattle and bang,  
The thud and thump, the regular dance,  
The reverie-words, that fit to the tune ;  
The clatter and sway of the wheels that are polking  
And pawing the steel—rhythm, wild rhythm—away!

Pawing and gripping distended blue steel, that  
    widens before  
And lessens behind, supporting the mass on its  
    ballasted bed,  
That rocks as a cradle, like the engine ahead.  
To the rushing and slamming of all things departing;  
The wires that drop and are caught; the swishing,  
    exploding,  
Concussion and flashing of thunderbolt trains in their  
    haste ;  
The lightning of force, congestion of strength,  
Mad throbbing and pulsing of life that is speed !

Now comes the long, shrill whistle through the  
    corridor

Of windy space along the linked divisions of the train.  
The city's near at hand — with all its lights, like  
    hov'ring fire-flies.

We pass the leisurely out-going trains, with blank  
    freight vans,

Or cars that team with life, the engine steaming idly,  
    spurting right and left.

Then all at once we feel the pressure of the valves—  
And then, as if held back by giant hands, the speed  
relents.

Relaxed, we still float on. Soon all is silent, save  
the echoing

Reverberation of the station's vault, as peacefully we  
glide

Within its broad embrace. Then comes the sound  
of many feet—

Of 'hurry, bustle to and yon, and different voices  
raised . . . . .

As we pass out, we note the calm, majestic steed—  
Its heavy breathing and its silent look.



## A CATASTROPHE.



### LAST STATION IN LIFE.

Death silently beside the driver took his place.  
I saw a ghoul pass swiftly up the line;  
—— The train leaps out into the night!

### ON THE LINE.

No stars! the night as blank as dreamless sleep;  
“The Special and the Down Express, you say!”  
“Look out! those wire fences cut.”  
“There goes a lantern—follow that.”  
“Now! there again—hear that! Make haste!”  
“Come on!!” “There goes a fellow with an axe.”

One engine buried in the bank,  
The other wheels in air;  
And nearer none can penetrate—  
The whole enveloped in dense steam . . . .

There's nothing to be done!  
We sit upon the bank and curse,  
Cold sweat and tightened hearts.  
We stop our ears and think;  
Are all our dear ones still at home?  
Can any one we know be there!—  
The dread of other trains!

Now more pipes burst! New puffs of steam  
That rise fantastic—like the ghosts of those  
Whose cries we miss from out the mass!  
Strange—even now—now I am old:  
I think I see these ghosts come in at night,  
Stand by my bed; complain of Death—  
Refuse to be consoled or comforted . . . .  
Has God rejected them?

The heat and steam subside.  
We have more lanterns now.  
Oh, the first sight of such a thing!  
Forced through the eyes into the brain.  
A great, strange mountain mass,  
With here and there



Wet splashes of dark red ;  
Bodies ! bodies without winding-sheets ;  
Stark, stounded, and undone.  
This all at once !  
Cut in the middle of a breath ;  
Solution sudden as a fine electric spark,  
And dissolution heaped upon itself !  
Mad marriages of metals forcēd  
Into the frailer substances ;  
And yet the parting of all things  
That should hold partnership.  
Bent, twisted iron—brass, impact jambs,  
Bruised wood ; the mangling of all things  
Laid bare, undressed, with their last heart-beat  
spent !

Stretchers, swinging stretchers,  
Coming empty, going full.  
The handsome, strong young man,  
His legs and arms pinned in the hot *debris*,  
Who only asks that we will let him die,  
Who at the first stroke of the axe  
Gives up the ghost !  
The dead child in the insane mother's arms—

The mother, laughing, says it soon will wake ;  
She knows not what has passed—will never  
know.

The little boy who wants  
His father to come home.  
Stretchers, swinging stretchers,  
Coming empty, going full.  
Confusion and bewilderment,  
The rushing to and yon—the sobbing  
Seeking some identity  
Blurred out of human ken.  
And that inevitable,  
In all such railway devil's double crack,  
Most ghastly of it all,  
The scalded maniac, with peeling flesh,  
That tramps and dances on the faces  
Of the dying and the dead . . . .  
A flame, like eagle sprung to perch,  
Breaks from the apex of the mass  
And crackles—reaching down ; *the end*—  
And the last mastery of hell !

Slowly—slowly creeping up the rails  
It comes at last—this calm, unheeding dawn

For wounds and tearful eyes—  
In blood-red stripes—like all this anguish  
Of the night reflected in the skies—  
Half veiled by thin, white scudding clouds:  
The spirits of those swift departed dead  
That go up to confront, in protests mute,  
Great Heaven's wide, astonished eyes.



## AN AMPUTATION.

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### SURGEON AND CHILD.

“Have you no father, mother, little one?”

“No—father, he was killed—and mother, mother she is dead.”

“How long has she been dead?”

“I don’t remember, Sir. But father said I had a mother and she looked like me.”

“No brothers, sisters, and no friends?”

“No—not as other children have ;

But I have got a friend. He gave me this—

This little cross, so I should know he was my friend.

That was a present, and he was my friend :

He went away a long, long time ago ; but he’ll come back again

Because he was my friend. See— isn’t it a pretty cross ?”

"God grant you grace to bear it bravely till he  
come . . . .

*Put on the sponge and throw the shades up high ;  
I want more light ; Now ready with the pincers and the  
spray.*

O may I prove a friend to you, poor little one !  
*Give me the knife."*





# WILD CATS.





## WILD CATS.

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I feel that you are in this crowded place with me,  
And that you also know that I am here ;  
It is as if we were alone. The other people  
Are closed books, or like indifferent pictures on the  
wall—

Nothing to us—mere furniture to garnish space—  
Empty themselves, as we are full and all complete to  
ourselves—

Alone in this great crowded reading room.

When first we met, you rose from where you sat,  
In all the strong and upright glory of your woman-  
hood,

And looked me in the eyes as I advanced, as if to  
challenge me.

I felt a stound—a something break—a welling up of  
joy !

Then a great calm of satisfaction and content.

I feared for you, yet could not sacrifice—renounce ;  
I knew the danger—all ; inevitable—fixed . . . .  
Our hands but touched and suddenly our lips were  
    locked !  
With all your being trembling—exquisite, enveloped .  
    by my own ;  
While someone pitying, quick drew the curtain  
    over us.

Now, when again we hear the wild cats in the night,  
I laugh—and you draw close to me,—and soon  
You also laugh ! And we both laugh in soft content.



